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## **Economy & Efficiency Commission Presentation**

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*Editorial Note: Although every effort has been made to insure the accuracy of the material in this presentation, the scope of the material covered and the discussions undertaken lends itself to the possibility of minor transcription misinterpretations.*

**PRESENTATIONS BY  
Mr. Donald Blevins  
Chief Probation Officer, Probation Department  
Los Angeles County**

**January 6, 2011**

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### **Overview of LA County Probation Department**

Chairman Barcelona greeted Donald Blevins, Chief Probation Officer of the LA County Probation Department and welcomed him while turning it over for Mr. Blevins to speak to the Economy and Efficiency Commission.

### **Probation Department Overview**

Mr. Blevins stated that he was hired as the Chief Probation Officer in Alameda County in 2003 spending 6½ years there where he essentially walked in on a much smaller scale of a Department that was not functioning at a very high level and had a lot of issues that needed to be addressed. He stated that while he was there he did a great job of turning that Department around which got the attention of LA County. He also stated that he had contemplated retirement but he loves a challenge. He stated that he couldn't picture a bigger challenge than coming to a Department that is as large and diverse as the LA County Probation Department. Mr. Blevins stated that he is responsible for the daily operation of the Department and for formulating a long-term vision that will enhance administrative services and field operations as the Department moves into the 21st century. He stated that in managing the largest Probation Department in the nation, he oversees an annual budget of approximately \$630 million, a total of over 6,000 employees, and the supervision of approximately 63,000 adult and 20,000 juvenile probationers. He stated that he reports directly to the County's Board of Supervisors on the Probation Department's initiatives and operations.

Mr. Blevins stated that he recommends sanctions to the courts, enforces court orders, operates correctional institutions and incarcerates delinquents. He stated that he designs and implements programs to reduce crime and to ensure victims' rights. He stated that his Department serves the courts and the community by: conducting 80,000 pre-sentence investigations annually on adults convicted of a crime—and about three-quarters of these are felony convictions; conducting 47,000 investigations annually on minors found to have committed what would have been a criminal act for an adult; supervising 80,000 adults and 23,000 juveniles placed on probation by the courts, including 15,000 in special programs; collecting \$12.7 million in restitution and fines from adult and juvenile probationers; disbursing restitution to 27,000 victims of crime;

providing secure detention in juvenile halls for approximately 1,700 minors at any one time; and providing control and rehabilitation programs in camp facilities for approximately 4,000 minors each year.

Mr. Blevins stated that the Los Angeles County Probation Department also processes juvenile referrals in a manner similar to most probation departments in California; however, program operations are substantially larger in size and geography. He stated that his Department provides investigative services relative to petition requests, recommends sanctions to the court, enforces court orders through supervision of minors in the community; and when appropriate, detains minors in correctional facilities. He stated that to address detention crowding in its three juvenile halls, 16 camps and one secure suitable placement, intermediate sanctions are utilized for non-violent offenders.

Mr. Blevins stated that there is a wide range of things that Probation Departments do. He stated that in the criminal justice system the Probation Department is probably the most misunderstood agency in the group. He stated that everyone knows the roles of LAPD and Sheriffs that they arrest people and the Sheriffs run the jail. He stated the judges adjudicate cases and the DA prosecute cases. He stated that after a person goes through the court system whether they are adult or juvenile, 85 to 90% of them come to the Probation Department. He also stated that the Probation Department gets the cases from between 2 to 5 years. He stated that on the adult cases the Probation Officers write court reports that give recommendations to the court on what sanctions should happen to an individual and after they are placed on probation the Officers supervise those individuals at various levels to make sure that they are following the court order. He stated that for the juvenile cases it is a different process in that there is a basic premise in the juvenile system that kids do kid things even though they are labeled as criminals and that there is an excellent chance you can rehabilitate a child provided that you can provide the right program. He stated that you can do the same thing on the adult side as well. Mr. Blevins stated that some things that has happened to the Probation Department of the last several years is that his Department has learned about a body of research called evidence-based practices. He stated that essentially evidence-based practices is based on the premise that there are some basic risk factors as to why people get involved in criminal activities, for both juveniles and adults. He stated that some of the reasons can be social attitudes, dysfunctional families, negative peer association, substance abuse, and for juveniles-truancy in school. He stated that if you focus on the risk factors you can improve your odds of changing criminal behavior and improving the Department's outcomes. He stated that LA County Probation Department is quickly moving in that direction.

### **Residential Treatment Services**

Mr. Blevins stated that the one of the biggest challenges he inherited when he walked in the door was the Probation Camps. He stated that the Camp Community Placement provides intensive intervention in a residential treatment setting. He stated that upon commitment by the court, a minor receives health, educational and family assessments that allow treatment tailored to meet their individual needs. He stated the goal of the program is to reunify the minor with their family, to reintegrate the minor into the community, and to assist the minor in achieving a productive crime free life. He also stated that these Probation camps service approximately 2,200 minors per day.

Mr. Blevins stated that the fundamental objective of the Residential Treatment Service experience is to aid in reducing the incidence and impact of crime in the community. He stated that this is accomplished by providing each minor with a residential treatment experience geared toward developing effective life skills.

Mr. Blevins also stated that the camps provide a valuable and cost effective intermediate sanction alternative between probation in the community and incarceration in the California Youth Authority. Mr. Blevins stated that upon initial arrival at camp, minors are orientated as to camp procedures and protocols. He stated that during their camp stay minors receive training in Personal and Social Responsibility plus the G.O.A.L.S. components. He also stated that minors continue to be prepared for graduation into the community by receiving Family Issues and Substance Abuse training.

### **Detention Services Bureau**

Mr. Blevins stated that the mission of the Detention Bureau is to protect the community while maintaining a

safe, clean, healthy, secure environment for minors detained at the juvenile halls; and while detained, to provide programs designed to address their needs, as well as to decrease their ability and desire to commit criminal acts.

Mr. Blevins also stated that the Los Angeles County Probation Department's Detention Services Bureau (DSB) provides intake housing, and transportation services for minors detained in the three juvenile halls. With a population that fluctuates between 1,500 to 1,800 minors per day, the juvenile halls provide secure housing for both pre-adjudicated and post-disposition wards of the juvenile court. He stated that additional accommodations are made for minors detained at juvenile halls pending trial in adult court.

Mr. Blevins stated that the Federal Department of Justice (DOJ) came into the Juvenile Halls about 9 years ago because of the problems that had been reported from the Juvenile Halls. He stated that over a period of 4 or 5 years there had been a number of provisions that the Department had to accomplish in order for the Federal Department of Justice to sign off to say that the Probation Department is running their Juvenile Halls the way Juvenile Halls are suppose to run. He stated that the end result is that they have corrected a lot of problems in the Juvenile Halls. He stated that there was a logical progression that if things were not working in Juvenile Hall then what about the Camps. He stated that no one was paying any attention to what was going on out there so the DOJ immediately moved into the Camps. He also stated that it is very important that the Department takes it seriously when the Federal Government is asking your Department to make changes because if you don't then they could end up suing you, you could go to court and spend a lot of time and money on legal fees, and the end could result in a lost of control over how you operate as well as the Board of Supervisors losing control.

Mr. Blevins stated that from 2008 until he walked in the door the Department had done very little to accomplish what the 38 provisions said that the Department needed to do. He stated that he was not aware of this at the time. He also stated that with 35 years of experience it is a monumental challenge because the Department has until October of 2011 to accomplish all 38 provisions. He stated that he is confident that his Department will satisfy the DOJ but it is a lot of work. He stated that one of the other things he inherited that he didn't know about was a \$25 million dollar budget deficit. He stated that essentially when the last Chief left and he was hired the Department finished the year \$25 million dollars over budget. He stated that he had a lot of budget experience while in Alameda County. He stated that his Department closed the budget gap by reducing overtime, working more efficiently, and fixing major problems that needed to be fixed. He stated that revenue did not come in at the level that the Department had budgeted for. He also stated that the most effective way of reducing your cost is reducing the number of employees. He stated that 70 to 75% of the budget is salary and employee benefits. He stated that the Department is still responsible for feeding and clothing the children in Juvenile Hall, and provide each of them nutrition. He stated that this is also a major part of his Department's budget.

### **Probation Strategic Goals, Programs, and Initiatives**

Mr. Blevins stated that in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health and the Chief Executive Office, he developed a definitive plan for the placement of mentally ill minors in a specialty County facility. He stated that currently, between 60 and 70 pre-adjudicated minors are supervised 1-on-1 by Probation staff in juvenile halls everyday. The current staffing model for these high-need youth is costly from a staffing perspective and does not sufficiently provide the level of clinical care necessary to assist these minors with successful community reintegration. He stated that his Department will complete a service realignment in the Department's juvenile halls and camps that will improve the continuity of care for minors. He also stated that this will be accomplished by initiating actions designed to place minors in services and programs before they are either released to group homes or placed in a juvenile camp facility. He stated that his Department has to achieve at least a 50% completion of the DOJ Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in the juvenile camps. He stated that his Department is committed to working with all partners to ensure comprehensive success with all provisions of the MOA.

Mr. Blevins stated that his Department is working on improving risk management procedures to further reduce liability and worker's compensation exposures and reduce departmental cost of risk by five percent

and begin the implementation of the risk avoidance plan activity steps. He stated that the Department is collaborating with the Casey Foundation to develop and implement a juvenile justice practice model that will incorporate the needs of Title IV-E minors and those who are at risk of crossing from dependency to delinquency. He stated that the Department is working on completing the recommendations of the comprehensive education reform for juvenile halls and camps as approved by the County Board of Supervisors, which includes the implementation of the career technical education/vocational education program at four camp facilities in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Office of Education. He stated that the Department will also complete the implementation of the Probation Case Management System, which will better organize and process the probationer caseloads.

### **Department Accomplishments**

Mr. Blevins stated that his Department opened an adult day reporting center near Slauson Avenue and San Pedro Street in Los Angeles to provide adult probation clients a wide array of services and programs to assist them on completing their probation. He stated that this is one of two fully operational community day reporting service models the Department plans to implement. He also stated that the other model is for juvenile offenders and is anticipated to be operational during 2010.

He stated that the Department created and implemented a credit card payment option to collect court-ordered fees, fines, and restitution on adult cases. He stated that the Department completed implementation and monitoring of all provisions of a MOA originating from the DOJ Constitutional Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act review of three juvenile halls.

Mr. Blevins stated that Probation is now working on the completion of provisions within an MOA resulting from the DOJ's review of Probation's 18 juvenile camps and the Dorothy Kirby Center. He stated that the Department completed its strategic plan and developed a data-driven strategy to implement the plan across all operational functions. He also stated that the strategic plan sets operational objectives and the strategies to achieve those objectives, and serves as an action plan guiding the Department's strategic direction for the next few years. He stated that the Department worked in collaboration with several other County Departments and the juvenile court in developing a strategy for reducing the number of minors who crossed over from the dependency system to delinquency. He stated that the project was sponsored by the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University.

### **Questions**

Chairman Barcelona asked about Mr. Blevins' plan for his Department paying back the \$25 million dollars that he alluded to earlier in his presentation. Mr. Blevins replied that you have to cut. He stated that you have to come in \$25 million dollars under budget the following year to be able to reset the budget. He stated that there are a couple of ways to generate revenue i.e. fines and fees on probationers, He stated that on the juvenile side you can collect fees from parents on the cost of housing, feeding, and clothing the children. He stated that the Board of Supervisors doesn't like the Department to do those things because they think families are challenged enough without the Department billing them for their kids being in Juvenile Hall. He stated that the Department could look into charging booking fees like the Sheriff or fees for Law Enforcement Agencies to bring kids to Juvenile Hall but it would hurt the Department because it would upset every Law Enforcement Agency in LA County.

Commissioner Reznik asked how long has the Juvenile Camp funding been in existence. Mr. Blevins replied that the funding stream has been there since 2002. Commissioner Reznik asked why even with the funding being there that the camps still has people waiting three years without getting into the program. Mr. Blevins replied that that is a different program. He stated that the program that has the three year waiting period is the State Program and the funding comes directly from the State. He stated that for probation there is no waiting period for the camps. He stated that when a child is sentenced to the camp they go through a two-week assessment and then they are in camp after that two-week assessment.

Commissioner Glassman asked what are the underlying assumptions in the Department that leads to that unhealthy culture. Mr. Blevins replied that Commissioner Glassman has obviously done a lot of research.

He stated that changing the culture is the hardest job. He stated that the one thing he has told the Board of Supervisors is that he knows they are anxious for major change in his Department but the cultural change will take three to five years to accomplish. He stated that he changed it at Alameda County and brought in two industrial psychologist that did a complete survey of the staff and the kids. He stated that from this survey he found out that the supervisors were the biggest problems. He stated that from this survey the Department developed a training program that was designed to teach the staff and the supervisors how to view themselves differently in their role when working with the kids. He stated that it took two years to finish the training program.

Commissioner Glassman asked what are the underlying things here that he needs to deal with separate from the things he already mentioned. Mr. Blevins replied that he had a conversation with the same two psychologist and that they are going to come in February and do an assessment on the camps first, Juvenile Hall second, and then staff and supervisors last. He stated that he thinks they are going to find the same thing with LA County. He stated that he has staff in camps that aren't engaged in working with the kids. He stated that to hold the staff accountable you have to have the right supervisors engaged in accountability. He stated that his Department is going to learn real quickly on what the problem is with the culture of the Department. He stated that the culture will be changed but it will not happen overnight.

Chairman Barcelona expressed his appreciation to Mr. Blevins and invited him to come back to speak to the EEC in the near future and the Commissioners applauded.

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